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Persuasive discourse and language planning in Ireland[1]

Colonial language discourse typically consists of evaluations concerning the respective merits of two or more languages, and the cultures they represent. This can serve as a warrant for imposing a 'superior' language. Although such discourse tends to be associated with the conquest of the New World and subsequent European expansion, there is evidence that in the case of Ireland – England's first overseas colony – an adversarial relation between English and Irish languages existed even before the Elizabethan period. Referring to English legislation, chronicles and other documents, this paper examines the norms, arguments and rhetorical strategies that were used to exert the dominance of the English language in Ireland during late-medieval and early-modern times. In the latter half of the paper, the focus will shift to attempts to create, especially from the seventeenth-century onwards, a 'pro-Irish reversal' that used similar arguments and rhetoric to reclaim this denigrated language. Our suggestion is that these pro- and anti-colonial language discourses anticipate those that were used later on in colonial and postcolonial environments.

1. *Introduction*

The Anglo-Norman intrusions into Ireland, which began in 1169 under Henry II, did not immediately cause a confrontation between two antagonistic and hermetically separate cultures. Instead, an *assimilation* of Anglo-Norman settlers into Irish society took place through trade, intermarriage, offspring, fosterage and the adoption of Irish – the vernacular language of the majority of the indigenous population. Whether we regard these zones of contact as exceptional or as normal for colonial dynamics, the point is that the blurring of cultural and linguistic

boundaries became deeply problematic for the English Crown in medieval and Tudor times. Early written evidence of its unease shows that the legacy of Henry II's invasion was not reducible to an opposition between two mutually exclusive categories: i.e., a confident master-culture enforcing its sovereign will from another country, and a subjugated population of Ireland. Instead, there was the threat of linguistic contact and the mixing of cultures.

This paper takes stock of this threatening aspect of colonial dynamics, a factor that is sorely missed by Phillipson's (1992: 109) claim that the *locus classicus* of English linguistic imperialism is Defoe's story of how Robinson Crusoe effortlessly imposed his own language and culture upon Man Friday. Equally significant, if not more so, is the fact that Crusoe's irrational imaginings of 'savages' and fictional 'others' became, in the aftermath of his shocking discovery of the footprint in the sand, an unsettling antidote to any model of colonialism as essentially a simple, diligent and linear process of exercising control over people and territory (Pennycook 1998: 11). In the twisting story of Anglo-Irish relations, it is possible to decipher a fear of mixing that was as disturbing as any spectre of contact with the 'other' that confronted Crusoe. Negative images of Irishness, which were used as justifications for asserting English control of political power and economic resources, and a policy of religious and cultural assimilation, started to develop during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. We will show how these discourses became inextricably linked to alleged differences between the English and the Irish languages, and to the contrasting cultures which these differences were said to represent.

More specifically, we will examine the norms, arguments and rhetorical strategies that comprised an overall public discourse aimed at counteracting the assimilation of Anglo-Norman and, later, English settlers into Irish culture and language. Referring to English legislation, chronicles and other written documents of late medieval and early-modern times, we will situate this investigation within the broad confines of persuasive discourse and language planning. Our suggestion is that these claims about language differences, and the justifications deduced from them for exerting linguistic and cultural dominance, are typical of colonial discourses that were used later on in postcolonial environments, as exemplified below. In the latter half of the paper, attention will shift to

attempts to build, especially from the seventeenth-century onwards, a contrary type of discourse – a 'pro-Irish reversal' – that used similar arguments and rhetoric to reclaim the intrinsic qualities and cultural values of the Irish language that had been denigrated.

2. *Early colonial discourse*

The connection between language dominance and colonization is an idea that starts in Elizabethan times. It is in the late sixteenth century that we find the earliest statements about the spread of English in connection with colonization (Pennycook 1998) and, more or less at the same time, statements about the dominance of one variety or dialect over others, even within Great Britain. These statements are evidence that the process of standardizing the English language was already underway (Blank 1996). We tend to think that the typical arguments of colonial language policies emerge in modern times, but the analysis of documents referring to Ireland suggests that some types of dynamics actually start earlier. It is possible that the Irish experience did in fact help to develop colonial language discourse: this was the first time that the English rulers were confronted with an opposition based on language, among other identity markers.

Thus, in spite of the obvious differences between the colonial dynamics of the nineteenth century and the political and social processes existing in previous periods, there are striking parallels in the kind of rhetoric and in the arguments used at these different times. This article clarifies the discourse continuities as well as the specific features of debates about language in Ireland, which further highlights the importance of the Irish case. Although the close link between language and (national) identity developed during the Renaissance, it is possible that this development was encouraged and accelerated by the Irish situation before that time, when the first waves of English settlers identified with their new environment to such an extent that they created deep worries in their rulers. These anxieties are revealed by the sparse documentary evidence, amongst which a text that stands out is the *Statutes of Kilkenny* (1366). It shows that the English rulers needed to forbid by law the assimilation of the English settlers in Ireland through language adoption (Crowley 2005: 2-3), besides other things:

> III. Item ordine est et establie que chescun Engleys use la lang Engleis et soit nome par nom Engleys enterlessant oulterment la manere de nomere use par Irroies et que chescun Engleys use la manere guise monture et appareill Engleys solonc son estat et si nul Engleys ou Irroies [conversant entre Engleys use la lang Irroies] entre eux-mesmes encontre cest ordinance et de ceo soit atteint soint sez terrez et tentz sil eit seisiz en les maines son Seinours immediate tanque qil veigne a un des places nostre Seignour le Roy et trove sufficient seurtee de prendre et user la lang Engleis et adonques eit restitution de sez ditz terres… (*Statuts de Kilkenny*, 1366)[2].

This identification of Irish speakers as 'enemies of the state' is reported already in 1270, but was largely ineffectual as a deterrent (MacGiolla Chriost 2005: 79)[3]. It therefore had to be reaffirmed in the ordinance of Waterford (1492), and even the proclamation of Henry VIII as king (1541) seems to have been pronounced in Irish by the local Parliament – a gesture which confirms the symbolic value of Irish[4] as a "language of resistance" (Kallen 1994: 152-3)[5]: in spite of having to yield to English political rule, the local powers insisted on using their own language in official contexts.

This brings into public discourse, both of the normative and of the argumentative types, the first two colonial arguments we find, i.e.

1) the inclusion of language among the *habits* that identify a population[6], along with clothing, etc (Crowley 2005: 8). For instance, Sir William Darcy warned Henry VIII that in Desmond and Ormond, "the lords and gentlemen […] be in no better case than the wild Irish, for they use Irish habit and Irish tongue". Also, "The Lorde Deputes Boke"

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[2] "III. Also, it is ordained and established, that every Englishman do use the English language, and be named by an English name, leaving off entirely the manner of *naming* used by the Irish; and that every Englishman use the *English custom, fashion, mode of riding and apparel*, according to his estate; and if any English, or Irish living among the English, use the Irish language amongst themselves, contrary to this ordinance, and thereof be attainted, his lands and tenements, if he have any, shall be seized […]." (italics added)

[3] There is frequent reference, also in the Statutes of Kilkenny, to the *guise et lang des Irrois ennemyes* ("the ways and language of the Irish enemies", italics added), and to the fact that the offenders, as evident from the quotation above and other passages, were punished very harshly.

[4] We call this language 'Irish' since it is no longer considered appropriate to call it 'Gaelic', as some of the older literature does (Dhomhnaill 1997: 46).

[5] According to Hickey (1993: 215), the first half of the sixteenth century was in fact the lowest point in the spread of English in Ireland.

[6] One is inevitably reminded of Bourdieu's notion of normative social *habitus* (Crowley 1996: 81 ff.).

confirms that the "Englyshe marche borderers use Iryshe apparell, and the Iryshe tounge … oneles they come to Parlyament or Counsayll" (quoted by Palmer 2001: 42).

2) the importance of *naming*: both placenames and personal names are often discussed. Their symbolic value is emphasized, and the habit of English settlers adopting Irish nicknames is criticized (Crowley 2005: 32). At the same time, the opposed trend, i.e. for Irish people to anglicize their names and place names, is repeatedly encouraged if not prescribed by law. Evidence for this is found in a somewhat later document, prescribing

> […] how new and proper names more suitable to the English tongue may be inserted with an alias for all towns, lands, and places in that kingdom, that shall be granted by letters patents; which new names shall thenceforth be only names to be used, any law, statute, custom, or usage to the contrary notwithstanding. (*An Act for the Explaining of some Doubts Arising upon… an Act for the Better Execution of his Majesty's Gracious Settlement of his Majesty's Kingdom of Ireland*, 1665, quot. Crowley 2000: 76)

Abandoning this mark of identity leads to *degeneration*, i.e. forsaking one's own kin (Blank 1996: 145; Crowley 1996: 134). The idea of degeneration was also mobilized when dealing with Irish English. Its first forms go back to the medieval settlements, and it was seen as dangerously deviating from the standard written form of the language that was developing in Elizabethan England (Blank 1996: 145). Spenser introduced this argument in his well-known dialogue, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, dating from 1596 [1763: 103-105]:

> *Iren:* And first I have to find fault with the abuse of language, that is, for the speaking of Irish amongst the English, which, as it is unnatural that any people should love another's language more than their own, so is it very inconvenient and the cause of many other evils.
> *Eudox:* It seemeth strange to me that the English should take more delight to speak that language than their own, whereas they should (methinks) rather take scorn to acquaint their tongues thereto, for it hath ever been the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all means to learn his. So did the Romans always use, insomuch that there is almost no nation in the world but is sprinkled with their

language. It were good therefore (methinks) to search out the original cause of this evil […].

Iren: I suppose that the chief cause of bringing in the Irish language amongst them was specially their fostering and marrying with the Irish, the which are two most dangerous infections, for first the child that sucketh the milk of the nurse must of necessity learn his first speech of her, the which being the first that inured to his tongue is ever after most pleasing to him, insomuch as though he afterwards be taught English, yet the smack of the first will always abide with him, and not only of the speech, but also of the manners and conditions: for besides that young children be like apes, which will affect and imitate what they see done before them, specially by their nurses whom they love so well, they moreover draw into themselves, together with their suck, even the nature and disposition of their nurses, for the mind followeth much the temperature of the body; and also the words are the image of the minds, so as they, proceeding from the mind, the mind must be needs affected with the words; so that the speech being Irish, the heart must needs be Irish, for out of the abundance of the heart the tongue speaketh.

As in the time of the ancient Greeks, discourse about differences between languages, and therefore people, soon takes the form of discrimination: the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought another argument:

3) the spread of the connection between language and *degree of civilization*, with adjectives like *rude*, *ignorant*, etc. contrasted with *civil*, *obedient*, etc. (Palmer 2001: 16). According to Governor Bingham, the old colonists had "growne to suche barberous, disordered manner and trade of life" that they had become entirely "irishe in speech" (quoted by Palmer 2001: 44; for similar quotations see Miège 1715: 667 ff.)[7]. The next step was that of developing

4) the connection between language and *morals*, which often also means a correlation with religion, especially in the Irish context. This brings

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[7] Apart from the long-standing claims about the "barbarity of Scots" (Wales 2002: 53), compare what was said about American English by a Scottish academic at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "I have heard in this country… and see daily in dissertations from the press, errors in grammar, improprieties and vulgarisms which hardly any person of the same class in point of rank and literature would have fallen into in Great Britain" (quoted in McCrum et al 1987: 236). It was in a similar vein, though without direct mention of language, that Charles Grant wrote about India in the 1830s: "The Hindoos err, because they are ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid bifore them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them, would prove the best remedy for their disorders" (quoted in Kachru 1986: 6).

us to the use of medical metaphors, of language as an *infection*, a *cancer* to be extirpated (Crowley 2005: 14). This attitude is represented by the following quotations from Richard Stanihurst's A *Treatise Containing a Plain and Perfect Description of Ireland* (1577):

> [...] the Irish language was free dennized in the English pale: this canker tooke such deepe roote, as the body that before was whole and sounde was by little and little festered, and in maner wholy putrified. (quot. Palmer 2001: 42)

> Now whereas Irelande hath beene, by lawfull conquest, brought under the subjection of Englande, not onelye in king Henry the second his reigne, but also as well before as after…& the conquest hath béene so absolute and perfect, that all Leinster, Méeth, Ulster, the more parte of Connaght and Mounster, all the civities & burroughes in Irelande, have béene wholly Englished, and with Englishe conquerours inhabited, is it decent, thinke you, that theyr owne auncient native tongue shal be shrowded in oblivion, and suffer the enemies language, as it were a tettarre, or ring worme, to herborow it self within the jawes of Englishe conquerours? no truely. (quot. Blank 1996: 147)

Although highly representative of early colonial public discourse, this kind of ideology is also developed, at the same time, within Great Britain, when the growth of the standard leads to discrimination against the other varieties. The opposition to Irish is also voiced as an injustice because 'the conquered' should conform to the language of 'the conquerors', just as the English had to adopt Norman French. Stanihurst and Spenser are the main representatives of this argument, as shown in the quotations above.

The growth of language studies in the same decades, which were deeply influenced by this ideology, led in turn to the introduction of arguments on the intrinsic merits and faults of languages, be it in an aesthetic key or with more pretence of a 'scientific' description. Irish is then disparaged as a *rare, difficult, imperfect, defective* language in many treatises, as compared to the beauty and excellence of English[8]. This is the strand which brings us, in more popular or popularizing discourse, to the parodying and stereotyping of non-standard varieties and of foreign languages, also introduced in the Renaissance, e.g. in drama (Blake 1981;

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[8] The ostracism against Irish carries well into modern times, and was transferred to Irish English, which often goes even unmentioned in early histories of English (Pollner 2000).

Blank 1996: 144), where various salient, or even exaggerated features of some accents are employed with a characterizing (not always disparaging) intent[9]. This practice leads to the sheer hurling of insults at the targeted variety and at downgrading it to the inarticulate (Palmer 2001: 64-65). Although applied to English dialects as well[10], it is at its best with colonized languages, although with *distinguos* (Sanskrit could not be compared to beasts' cries, as e.g. African languages were). Many intellectuals joined in this strand of discourse; their best known remarks are the harsh ones penned by Swift. Albeit a purist, he was also a satirist and it can be contended that some of his remarks could be interpreted ironically (Crowley 2005: 86 also suggests this). Examples are when he speaks of "those abominable sounds" and names which "I defy any creature in human shape, except an Irishman of the savage type, to pronounce", and when he invokes the "abolition" of Irish, which could be easily accomplished, he maintains, over one generation (Swift 1728).

The worst fear, worse than that of the 'other', is that of mixture, of language, as well of people through intermarriage – this is the most dreaded consequence of de-generation, i.e. miscegenation. This fear, which occurs in all colonial contexts, is worse in the case of Ireland since this country is not so 'exotic', it always had an ambiguous status between that of the 'sister island' and that of a colony, both too close and too distant for comfort (Palmer 2001: 45):

> But, by dropping their guard against Irish, the Wexfordmen haue made a mingle mangle or gallamaulfrey of both the languages, and haue in such medley or checkerwyse so crabbedly iumbled them both togyther, as commonly the inhabitants of the meaner sort speake neyther good English nor good Irishe. (Stanyhurst, *Chronicle*, p. 14, quot. Palmer 2001: 42)

Thus, we can see that Ireland was in many ways the first experiment in the construction of colonial discourse with the anticipation of many arguments that are usually thought to have developed later, when English

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[9] In the case of Irish accents, this intent is often humorous, but not disjoint from positive features, as in some Shakespearean characters; thanks are due to one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this point.

[10] "Contrey people" are also described as having 'barbarous language' by the advocates of the nascent standard (Blank 1996: 25). This strand of thought is expressed also by eminent and influential linguists in the first part of the twentieth century, such as Wyld and Jespersen, as reported by Milroy (2002: 11).

imperialism reached its peak. Another clear case is the so-called utilitarian argument, i.e. the idea that the adoption of English is to the (economic) advantage of the colonized. The first voicings of this argument, in connection with Ireland, clearly antedate the time in which English became a prestigious language of wider communication. One example is given below:

> […] as concerns those who propose it were better to teach all Manners of Persons in the three Kingdoms to speak English, I will readily agree with them in that, as being of universal Advantage in order to promote Trade and Commerce; but those Gentlemen do not inform us how that is to be accomplish'd. (*Letter of presentation of an Irish Grammar*, Luhyd, 1706, quot. Malcolme 1744: 9)

It is interesting to notice that the word *Béarle*, first attested in Irish in 1540 to denote the English language, literally means 'technical language' (Mac Giolla Chriost 2005: 87).

3. *The rhetoric of dominance*

Attention will now turn to the dichotomies, semantic equivalences, metaphors and other rhetorical strategies that were used to reinforce the persuasive values of the above types of public discourse. A preliminary point is that even before the Tudor period, representations of differences between languages could be bound up with endowing them with symbolic values of belonging to a particular (national) culture, or of not belonging to it, or of lingering between these two positions in a dangerously hybrid space of contact. One of the earliest records concerning the Gaelicization of Anglo-Norman (English- and French-speaking) settlers – Giraldus Cambrensis' (Gerald of Wales') *Topographia Hibernica* of 1188 – contains implicit recognition of this link between language and (national) culture: "Thus, I say, 'evil communications corrupt good manners' and even strangers who land here from other countries become generally imbued with this national crime"(1863: 137-138). The efficacy of the rhetorical strategies that will now be investigated relied on these ideas[11].

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[11] It can be argued that this perception of language as a site of symbolic (non-)belonging increased, in some places at least, as a result of Henry VIII's break with Rome, the Reformation

One of the most basic of these strategies was the alleged division, in the sixteenth century, of Ireland's inhabitants into two mutually exclusive groups: the English and the Irish. Pennycook (1998: 47), following others, points out that such a dichotomy is one of the main conceptual constructs for justifying colonialism. A positive definition of 'self' (the colonizers) has to be juxtaposed with, and counterposed to, a negative definition of the 'other' (the colonized). In the following example, which comes from Boorde's *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge* (*c*.1547 [1870: 132]), an implicit contrast is drawn between English and Irish speakers. Invoking the dichotomies of emptiness vs. plentitude, and indolence vs. diligence, Boorde claims that beyond the borders of the Pale, Ireland is "wylde, wast [empty] & vast", and its inhabitants are "slouthfull, not regarding to sow & tille theyr landes, nor caryng for ryches". Yet within these borders, there is "good countrey" with plenty of food and "vertuous" people who are suitably "wel manerd, using the Englishe tunge". (Note also that it is possible here to discern notions of *terra nullius* – one of the legally endorsed grounds for British colonization of Australia – and indeed its extension into *persona nullius*.)

'Colonized'/'colonizer' dichotomies are also at work in the normative discourse (discussed above) concerning English/Irish habits and names. In addition, though, a semantic equivalence is set up between language behaviour, customs and dress (i.e., 'apparel', 'habit' and 'beard') by dint of their appearance in lists. This equivalence is found in various pieces of legislation that include the requirement, in the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366), that English names and English 'mode of riding and apparel' be used (*que chescun Engleys* […] *soit nome par nom Engleys* […] *et que chescun Engleys use la manere guise monture et appareill Engleys*); the title of Henry VIII's 1537 'Act for the English Order, Habit, and Language' (*Stat. Parl. Ire.* 1786: 28 H 8. c.xv.); and the 1695 Penal Law aimed at curtailing Irish Catholics from "not using the English habit and language" (*Stat. Parl. Ire.* 1786: 7 W 3. c.4). The 'paratactic' (rather than superordinate or subordinate) status of these items means they are joined together only by dint of appearing together. No ulterior explanation of their relations is given. This listing suggests that legislation concerning

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and the fact that vernacular 'tongues' (previously not thought of as having many functions beyond utilitarian communication) took on a status previously reserved for Latin. They became a source of written, 'eloquent' and revered (if not eternal) knowledge (Joseph 2006: 22).

linguistic differences ('tongue'/ 'language') was perceived as semantically equivalent to legislation concerning *cultural differences* ('order'/'habit'). Different criteria for choosing a name, different ways of riding a horse, and different types of beard could, it seems, have performed the same symbolic function of marking allegiance or disloyalty to the English Crown.

As already noted, it was claimed that neglect of such markers of identity could lead to 'degeneration'. Campion (1571 [1633: 14]), for example, alleged that "the very English of birth conversant with the brutish sort of that people, become degenerate in short space, and are quite altered into the worst rank of Irish rogues". Derived from the Latin *dēgenerāre*, and from its root *de genus*, the passage of this word into English retains the meaning of a departure from a genuine type, or of a decline from a higher to a lower type (Crowley 2005: 28). The OED records that the earliest uses of noun, adjectival and verbal forms of this lexeme occurred between 1555 and 1611, and that they were used to refer to events or social groups that were viewed as problematic: a Cornish revolt, Wyatt's rebellion and the Scots. With its theological connotations of a fall from divine grace, alleged *linguistic* degeneration – i.e., the use of Irish in the English pale – could be presented as a decline in civility and obedience, and thus as *cultural* decay. Sharing the same etymological root as 'degeneration', the term 'miscegenation' would later become a key word (in terms of both frequency and saliency) in rhetoric built around one of the most important cultural constructs of nineteenth-century colonialism: 'racial difference'. Denoting the concept of interbreeding (and hence the 'crossing' or 'adulteration' of blood), 'miscegenation' is a central term in Gobineau's influential *Essai sur L'inegalité des Races Humaines* (1853-1855), and in debates during the American Civil War about the threat of racial deterioration caused by intermarriage and the offspring of black and white races (Young 1995: 144-46).

Turning to rhetorical strategies for arguing that different languages indexed different degrees of civilization, we find assertions of a relationship of entailment or logical consequence between these two sets of phenomena. If A (a certain language is used), then B (there is a certain degree of civilization). According to Miège, Irish people's increased contact with the English language had brought great benefits: "by reason of the great Converse with the *English*, they are more civiliz'd than

formerly" (1715: part III, p. 8, emphasis in the original). Conversely, the same writer claims that the language of Ireland "is originally *British*, or at least a Dialect of it, but now very much degenerated from it, by reason of the Intermixture with Foreigners" (Miège 1715: part III, p. 4, emphasis in the original). Another rhetorical device, found in Elizabethan times, is the use of metaphors of agricultural practice to conceptualize the transmission of language-civilization correlates to future generations. Consider, for example, the words we have italicized in the following citation from Stanihurst (1577 [1587: 4]): those English settlers who had "impaled" [insulated] themselves from the indigenous population "did sunder themselves as well in *land* as in *language* from the Irish: rudeness was daie by daie in the country *supplanted*, civilitie *ingrafted* […] and in fine the coine of a young England was like to *shoot* in Ireland".

Metaphor is, of course, only one of various rhetorical strategies that rely on an alleged resemblance, comparison, or an analogy. These devices are at work when medical terms for the decay of a living organism are used to draw a similarity between the English settlers' use of the Irish language (a source domain), and moral decline (a target domain). The grounds for relating these two domains consist of the following medical concept: a gradual but undeniable growth of something alien in that which was previously united and identical with itself. This concept is used in Giraldus Cambrensis' *Topographia Hibernica* (1188), a text which had much influence upon the Anglo-Irish Chronicles of the Tudor and Stuart periods (Crowley 2000: 13). Giraldus' polemic against English (or Norman French) contact with the native Irish relies on the saliency of terms such as "stains", "corrupt", "contagious", and "the pest of treachery"[12]. In Elizabeth I's reign, the negative connotations of this terminology are still being transferred to the English settlers who have mixed with the Irish: they are alleged to be "greatly spotted in manners, habit and conditions with Irish stains" (Nugent *c*. 1584-1585).

In Stanihurst's invective of the same period, it is interesting to consider the proximity and semantic relations between these medical terms: "[…] the Irish language was free dennized in the English pale: this *canker* tooke

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[12] Giraldus speaks of *gens spurcissima*, *gens vitiis involutissima* (Dimock 1867: 165), besides being inhospitable (151) and lazy (152); he speaks of a place where *proditionibus pestis* is widespread, so much so that even visitors can fall prey to this *vitio patriae… innato et contagiosissimo* (168).

such *deepe roote*, as the *body* that before was *whole and sounde* was *by little and little festered*, and in maner *wholy putrified*" (quoted in Palmer 2001: 42 italics added). Note the semantic relations of antithesis that are set up between "whole" as a close synonym of "sounde" on the one hand, and "wholly" as an intensifier of "putrified" on the other. Note also the degree to which 'by little and little' communicates certainty and thus functions as an epistemic modaliser, and the relexicalization of "festered" as "putrified". The latter term had a more forceful and conclusive meaning. Further evidence of the importance of medical terminology is Elizabeth I's recorded use of it to correlate with morality and Protestant religion. Founded in 1592, the purpose of Trinity College Dublin, which was defined as "knowledge and civility', was contrasted with foreign universities that "have been *infected* with popery and other *ill qualities*" (*Cal. Pat. and Close Rolls Ire. Eliz.* 1862: 227 italics added).

Arguments about the intrinsic faults of the Irish language and the corollary, to be inferred from this, that the English language had inherent merits, relied on three main rhetorical strategies. Firstly, stereotypical generalizations were used. According to Nicolson (1715) Irish was "so intimately fraught with cursing and swearing and all vile profaneness". Secondly, discursive tropes such as irony or parody provided scope for ambivalent propositional attitudes (e.g., Swift's defiant claim, mentioned above, that only "an Irishman of the savage type" would be able to master Irish pronunciation). Thirdly, pseudo-scientific assertions were made that Irish was a "compound" language, and hence not a "pure" or "original" one. Cox (1689-1690), for example, claimed that Irish "borrows from the Spanish *com estato*, *ie* how do you do &c. from the Saxon the Words *Rath* and *Doon ie* Hill and many more: From the Danish many Words; from the Welsh almost half their Language". The mustering of evidence that Irish had borrowed from other languages could lead to bizarre and speculative claims about its history and origins: "I find it solemnly avouched […] that Gathelus, or Gaidelus, and after him Simon Brecke, devised the Irish language out of all other tongues then extant in the world" (Stanihurst 1577). Rather than judge these claims in terms of facts known today, it is necessary to understand that their persuasive value derived from a shared, implicit recognition that the Irish language symbolized a despised culture. To each of these three rhetorical strategies one can, though, apply Milroy's (2002: 9) observation that when

argumentation is about a language's internal properties or lineage, there is ample scope for masking value judgments with apparently objective, non-ideological claims.

Moving on to the utilitarian argument that the adoption of English in Ireland was to the economic advantage of the colonized, we should note the dilemma which faced Tudor and subsequent English governments. Was it better to require conformity to the tenets of the Reformation and hence preach in the vernacular, or to proselytize in English, and thus reduce the use of Irish for religious purposes? As late as 1712, Richardson answers this question through recourse to an 'end-justifies-the-means' argument: preaching in Irish is the best way to destroy Irish. This language policy would not be "an Encouragement of the Irish Interest, any more, than preaching in French in England, is an Encouragement of the French Interest" (Richardson 1712). Note that this negative comparison functions as an argument by analogy, and that it presupposes a nomenclaturist view of language as naming concepts that exist prior to, and that are not structured by, the use of language.

Of course, there is also the non-argument, which is in many ways one of the most powerful, i.e. the silencing of the other language, the pretence that it does not exist, as when dialogues with the 'natives' are reported as if they took place in English. There is ample evidence for the presence of interpreters and translators in Elizabethan Ireland (Cronin 2003: 119 ff.), but the related problems, and even the very presence of Irish, is often unmentioned (Palmer 2001: 40 ff.), e.g. in reporting negotiation dialogues, starting with the fourteenth-century manuscript inspired by Giraldus Cambrensis' *Conquest of Ireland*:

> Another thyng was bespoke bytwen ham, bott þat preuely, that Macmorgh ne sholđ nomore brynge vnked mon yn-to the lond,… (*The English Conquest Of Ireland Founded On Giraldus Cambrensis*. (MS. Trin. Coll., Dublin, E. 2. 31. Chapter IX)[13]

The various strategies enforced to occlude the persistent presence of Irish in Elizabethan times – unacknowledged translation, ventriloquism, and spectacle – are reviewed by Palmer (2001: 53-73) in direct connection

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[13] A rough modern version can read: "Another thing was discussed between them, but privately, that Macmorgh should no longer bring foreign men into the country".

with the strategies used for indigenous languages during later stages of colonialism, in which one sub-strategy is to convert the 'sounds' produced by the natives to cries, howls, and other semi-human noises, thus implicitly (when not explicitly) similar to animals, or at any rate to inferior beings. A corollary of this was that, when the language was acknowledged, it was in deviationist terms, i.e. as a deformed version of English, so that Irish does not appear to be recognized as a separate (id)entity (Palmer 2001: 45, 96).

4. *The counterarguments*

It is interesting to notice that many of the above-mentioned arguments are reversed in the discourse of resistance, i.e. a discourse that was produced by Irish people to defend their language from imperialist ideology. Ireland is not only the first place in which English colonial language policies emerge, but also the first to develop a reactive discourse of defence (Tymoczko – Ireland 2003: 14) and of language nationalism (Palmer 2001: 109). Although Irish is not the only banner of Irish identity, since ancient Breton has also been mentioned (Crowley 2000: 8), Irish has been the language on which the intellectual battle has concentrated. This resistance starts in the sixteenth century: it is a discourse that shows fairly typical postcolonial dynamics even at this early stage (Kallen 1994; Crowley 2005: 21-3), with a first peak in the eighteenth century, when a spate of dictionaries, grammar books and other texts were issued to try to counterbalance the 'injury' often invoked:

> in regard to the Injury done to their Language, which, without being understood, has been hitherto cri'd down, and ridiculed by the English in general, and by Some Gentlmen in particular… (*Preface to Irish-English dictionary*, 1744, quot. Malcolme p. 9)

The postcolonial dynamics of this discourse are emphasized in Dhomhnaill (1997: 46-47) and confirmed by the fact that it later influenced African-American discourse of reaction to slavery and of revolt against oppression (on the intellectual cross-fertilization between the two communities see Mishkin 1998). Blank (1996: 1) notices that issues of language have always been part of English discourse on national identity

since the early fifteenth century, and this discourse was first applied to, and first appropriated by, Ireland.

The main counterarguments are thus:

1) praise of the *beauty* and *antiquity* of Irish in the attempt to build a respectable 'pedigree' for this language. Most of the treatises, prefaces to dictionaries, etc. published in the eighteenth century contain such an argument. The aesthetic qualities most often quoted are *musicality*, *richness* and *flexibility*. One important corollary concerns

2) the *purity* of the language (see quotations in Crowley 1996: 104) because of its antiquity, as opposed to the more 'mixed' modern languages (for this fear of mixture and hybridity see below). For the reversal of discourse on miscegenation see e.g. Crowley (1996: 134). Another reversal takes place with the concept of

3) '*civilization*', i.e. Irish is claimed to be *elegant* and *polite*, in response to the detractors who classified it as the *howlings* and *cries* of the "wild Irish". The other main argument is that of

4) *identity*, which again here antedates the discourse of nationalisms and the late-nineteenth-century battles of the Gaelic League. Talk of battles here is not exaggerated as there is often recourse to *warfare* metaphors, e.g. in the appeal to women to do their share (Crowley 1996: 143). Another metaphor used by reversing it is that of the English language spreading like an *infection* or a disease, a cancer to be extirpated. This medical metaphor is appropriated and hurled back at the conquerors through, once again, satirical discourse and parody. Just as the Elizabethans parodied the Irish, so the first bardic satire mocking those Irish people affecting to speak English as social upstarts dates from the first half of the seventeenth century (Crowley 2005: 44).

The discourse strategies employed by the defenders of Irish are not however exempt from ambiguities, and therefore have been criticized. The main objection is that supporters themselves have contributed to the progressive silencing of Irish in modern times, since they have often used English, and not Irish, in their discourse (Crowley 2005: 81-2). This applies also to politicians and intellectuals, who often use Irish only when opening their speeches and/or in ceremonial formulae, even in debates about the language issues themselves (*Parliamentary Debates* 1921). This continues until the present, since even legislative texts (*Language Act* 2003, *Statement* 2006) prescribe the use of Irish only in parallel with

English and "as far as practical", with various other hedges and words of caution, which in most cases recognize the antiquarian value of Irish and hence its unsuitability for the modern world, and the failure of some early policies such as *Debates for the Commission* 1958. This attitude also extends to literature. Seamus Heaney, for example, who speaks about the importance of using "our own language" to express identity and political stance, refers with this phrase to Hiberno-English, not to Irish (McCrum *et al*. 1987: 193). To this we may add the relative marginalization of Irish in schools (Crowley 1996: 121), in the media, in spite of the apparently supportive policies (Ó hlfearnáin in 2000: 109; Coady and O'Laoire 2002), in the publication industry, and even for computer programs, which usually do not take Irish fonts. All of this comes from the 'abdication' of the government from an effective promotion policy[14], the responsibility for which is implicitly transferred to individuals and voluntary associations since the 1960s, as conveyed by all normative texts of the time (Ó hlfearnáin in 2000: 109; Crowley 2005: 78-79), where it is clear that the aim is more survival than revival (O'Laoire 1995: 223-225; Dhomhnaill 1997: 48), and is confirmed by the predominance of antiquarian interest both in the still important Irish League and in some modern literature. A considerable portion of the literary production during the Irish Revival of the second half of the nineteenth century, for instance, was formed by translations into modern Irish of medieval works, although there was also a substantial amount of new literature (Tymoczko and Ireland 2003: 16-7). The problem was that public response was not so enthusiastic, so that failure loomed even on early attempts (Ó Riagáin 1997: 31). All of this points to the fact that language does not encompass the whole of Irish identity (Crowley 2005:1; Mac Giolla Chriost 2005: 1-2)[15].

[14] Mac Giolla Chriost (2005: 125-126) emphasizes that even the crucial 1958 commission, appointed with the declared aim of supporting Irish, employs vague, ambiguous and hedging rhetoric in its *Report*, further revealing this reluctance to take drastic action. The same applies to the reports of another board, appointed in 1978 with similar functions.

[15] Most of the above applies to what is today the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland is of course a partly different story (Kallen 1994), but recently there has been more acceptance of Irish, e.g. previously it was even illegal to give one's name in Irish to a policeman (Crowley 2005: 7). As a symbol of political resistance, Irish has been employed by Sinn Fein, and therefore has been learnt by relatively more adult speakers (Mac Giolla Chriost 2005: 169). Yet this is not unrivalled since other parties have appealed to an even more ancient ancestry, such as that represented, as mentioned, by Old Breton (Crowley 2000: 8).

5. *The rhetoric of reversal*

It is now necessary to focus more closely on the rhetorical moves that were used to delimit and structure this reversal of arguments. We will see how it was indeed through 'echoes' and 'mirror reflections', rather than through terminal displacements of English colonial discourse, that diverse (Catholic and Protestant) voices of resistance produced aversions to, unwitting mimickings of, and even complicity with their English masters.

The development of the four counterarguments presented above – pedigree building (i.e., beauty and antiquity), purity, civilization and identity – needs to be understood as laying the foundations for a nineteenth-century context of *cultural* nationalism. That is to say, these counter-arguments became grounded in a rhetorical question: since Ireland had a language, a culture and a history of its own, why should it not have a nation of its own? Not reducible to only a *political* case for Irish 'Home Rule', this was a question that proved influential for national liberation movements elsewhere in Europe, and it attained full philosophical exposition in Fichte (1808) and Humboldt (1836)[16]. The irony, however, is that by using its motto "Tír is Teanga" ("the Nation is the Language") to provoke this question, the Gaelic League (founded in 1893) affirmed, rather than dismantled, certain ties between language and (national) culture that had already been implied by the English Crown in medieval times, and by colonial discourse in Elizabethan times. The 1366 *Statutes of Kilkenny* claimed that many of the English in Ireland 'live and govern themselves according to the manners, fashion, and language of the Irish enemies' (*vivent et se governement as maniers guise et lang des Irrois enemies*). Later, Spenser's character Exodus had declared that "the speech being Irish, the heart must needs be Irish" (1596 [1763: 104]). For the English, the Irish tongue-Irish culture connection was highly dangerous because it had contaminated English settlers; for the Gaelic Leaguers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it was a blessing that the Irish language was the key to cultural lineage (antiquity), and to difference

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[16] The fundamental connection between the use of a particular language, and the independence of a nation was the logical entailment of beliefs that a distinct language was a *guarantor* of nationality ("Wherever a separate language is found, there a separate nation exists" [Fichte 1808: 184]), and that a language was the *repository* of national identity ("From every language we can infer backwards to the national character" [Humboldt 1836: 154]).

from other cultures (purity). Neither the former nor the latter wished to exclude language from their discourses on cultural (and national) identity. Both groups saw language as having the potential to symbolize this identity – a potential they placed at the centre of their discourses.

We will now examine the rhetorical strategies of early 'reversal' arguments which laid the foundations for cultural nationalism, and for later arguments that stemmed from it. In their different accounts of the Irish language and history, Céitinn (1634), Lynch (1662), MacCruitín (1717), O'Conor (1753) and Vallancey (1772) provided a critical lever for reversing English versions of Ireland's past, and they provided a basis for subsequent arguments that the Irish language was central to any definition of what cultural and national independence meant. Here, appeals to antiquity took on an important rhetorical function of legitimating knowledge claims. Since, the essential argument went, the Irish language is very near to, or is indeed itself, the original, universal language that was given to humanity by the Christian God, the language and culture that derives from it today must have a highly prestigious status. A corollary of this was that the Irish language could be traced to a pristine state of monoglossia. For what language could be more pure and self-contained than a primordial one in which, perhaps, God and Adam had communicated?[17]

Three reversals, rather than displacements, of colonial discourse follow from these claims about antiquity and purity. First, the anti-Irish discourse of Campion (1571) and Stanihurst (1577) had also resorted to using Biblical origins of language to signal credibility. The Flood and the confusion of Babel in the Book of Genesis were significant moments for both the vilification and the defence of Irish language. Second, although the emphasis upon purity contradicts the imperialist principle of expansion through assimilation (i.e., the principle of reducing what is different to what is the same), it is an emphasis which is consistent with the rejection of mixing and polyglossia that was so forcefully advocated in Tudor, especially Elizabethan, times. Third, stereotypes were used, once again, to demonstrate that the pure, authentic qualities of one language made it superior to another. The sociolinguistic isolation that Stanihust (1577

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[17] The ultimate appeal to this kind of legitimation is found in Vallencey's (1786: 166) claims that "the language of Japhet and his descendants was the universal tongue", that "it is most wonderfully preserved" in Irish language, and that from this "the historian will be enabled to unfold the origin of people, and the settlement of colonies in the various parts of the old world".

[1587: 4]) had condemned when claiming that "the dregs of the old ancient Chaucer English" were still used in the enclaves of Fingal and Wexford, was now applauded. Edgeworth (1802: 199-200), for example, claimed that in "the phraseology of the lower Irish", it is possible to "hear many of the phrases and expressions used by Shakespeare". The reason for this was that these speakers' "vocabulary has been preserved in its *near pristine purity* since that time, because they have not had intercourse with those counties in England which have made for themselves a jargon unlike to any language under heaven" (italics added).

The English language was also the target of normative strategies for rebuilding a vision of Irish cultural and national *identity*. Measures taken, at the end of the nineteenth century, to replace English names of people, places and games with Irish ones, reversed the direction of policy that had been inaugurated by the 1366 *Statutes of Kilkenny*. Simultaneously, though, these measures unwittingly invested language with the same symbolic value that had driven Spenser (1596 [1763: 102]) to claim that by adopting Irish names, the English settlers had "degenerated from their ancient dignities". The rhetorical construction of a need to retrieve Irish identity also led to claims about the supremacy of the Irish 'race'. At one level, the assumption that there was an Irish racial type, and attempts to define it by conflating the physiological with the cultural, were operating. Consider, for example, Trench's (1912: 27) attempt to combine language with racial identity when he refuses, he says, to believe that "the Irish brain has ceased to be convoluted in accordance with the subtle architecture of the Gaelic sentence, or that the Irish larynx has ceased to be the counterpart of Gaelic phonetics". At another level, notions of 'race' were invoked that were less innocent than a mere "synonym for nation or people" (Lee 1989: 3). By opposing the Irish language to anglicization, and then equating English with miscegenation, the rhetorical move relied on the very source of fear that Tudor discourse had called "degeneration". O'Hickey (undated: 4) who attributed the loss of Irish identity to the spread of English, declared in the first Gaelic League pamphlet "it were better, in my opinion, to be something that could be clearly defined and classed; for anything at all would seem preferable to a mongrel, colorless, nondescript racial monstrosity". Anxiety that an Irish *genus* would be polluted also led to the tropes of moral corruption and medical disease which the English had previously heaped upon the Irish. The prediction

was made that "the English language in fifty years will be as corrupt as the Latin of the eighth century" (Gregory 1901: 49), and a metaphorical similarity was drawn between anglicization and "a stalking cancer" (O'Reilly undated: 13).

Whilst this rhetoric of the Gaelic League pointed to an either/or choice between reviving or abandoning the Irish language and culture in the face of increasing anglicization, it also filtered out a more complex and contradictory reality. There had, of course, never been a straightforward equation between Catholicism and the Irish language, or between Protestantism and the imposition of the English language. According to Hyde (1892 [1986: 191]), the founder of the Gaelic League and a member of the Protestant Church of Ireland, "the Irish language, thank God, is neither Protestant nor Catholic". Yet language differences could no more be detached from religious differences than they could be said to have followed their original fault lines. On the one hand, the irony was that by the mid-nineteenth century, Irish had associations with Protestant proselytising and was therefore resented by many Catholics – even though it had once been their majority language. On the other hand, despite Tudor attempts to enforce Protestantism through the vernacular, Catholicism remained the denomination of the majority while the English language became more widespread than Irish for utilitarian reasons – the only colonial argument that could *not* be convincingly reversed.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century when the Irish language did become more closely identified with Catholicism, the former was said to represent the moral values of the latter. The rhetoric here includes gendered tropes of "Mother Ireland", and "language wars" in which the "mission" of Irish women "[was] to make the homes of Ireland Irish" by staying at home to teach the native language to their children (quoted in Crowley 1996: 144). This alleged duty mirrors the assumption in Spenser (1596 [1763: 105]) that "the child taketh most of his nature from the mother". Predictably, the Irish language-Catholic morality connection was also articulated in terms of the intrinsic aesthetic qualities of Gaelic: its "very tones […] seem to deepen and sweeten, to enrich and dignify the outpourings of the heart towards God" (*Fáinne An Lae* 1989-1900: 114, 5).

Moving forward to late twentieth-century and present-day language rhetoric, a fertile field for developing it has been (as ever) disputes about education – including discussion of prisoners' motives for forming Irish-

language classes during the peak 1975-1985 period of Republican struggle (Crowley 2005: 194-195). A gap between truth values and persuasive values opens up in discourses about the *right* to speak (or not to speak) a language – especially a native one, and in official recognition of the *need* for linguistic equality and diversity[18]. It is significant that in 2005, the Language Commissioner Seán Ó Cuirreáin found it necessary to call for more "substance than symbolism" in these debates, to warn that legislation cannot by itself cannot save a language, and to point out that children born in Dublin hospitals during 2000 came from more than ninety linguistic backgrounds (Mac Murchaidh 2008: 222). A tacit admission, perhaps, that the Irish language is no longer so crucial for representing Irish identity, that it is now necessary to find other ways of representing this identity, and even that this identity does not exist outside of its rhetorical constructions (see, for example, Anderson's (2006) concept of 'imagined communities').

We have omitted until now another reversal of colonial discourse that may be regarded as 'ultimate' – in every sense of the word. For late nineteenth-century cultural nationalists, the contemporary use of Hiberno-English was disturbing because it undermined their rigid, binary oppositions between what was purely Irish or entirely English. Although its formation had been taking place for centuries, it was, ironically, not until the height of Gaelic League activity that the creative potential of Hiberno-English was recognized by literary authors. By praising it as a language "which *mingles* so much of the same [English] vocabulary with turns of phrase which have come out of Gaelic", the Irish poet Yeats (1902: 8, italics added) was effectively, and almost literally, reversing the negative values which had previously been attached to language hybridity, and that the Elizabethan imagination had proscribed as the spectre of "a *mingle mangle* or gallimaufry of both languages" (Stanihurst 1577, italics added). This fear of mixture goes far beyond the intellectual discussion, on purist grounds, on the use/misuse/overuse of Romance-derived words known as the 'Inkhorn Controversy', although both streams of thought are relevant to draw a picture of beliefs on language and (national) identity in Elizabethan England; while the Controversy mainly concerned adapted loanwords in writing, the opposition to language mixture in Ireland mainly

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[18] For example, during a Supreme Court case in 2001 (Ó Beoláin v Fahy), the Irish State was itself reprimanded for not maintaining the constitutional status of the Irish language: acts and statutory procedures had not been available in both English and Irish (Crowley 2005: 191).

refs to everyday speech. This is the same kind of opposition as there frequently is against code-switching in post-colonial environments, where language mixing is often attributed to "lack of education, bad manners or improper control of the two grammars" (Gumperz 1982: 62).

6. *Conclusion*

We have treated the case of Ireland – England's first overseas colony – as a site for investigating a normative and argumentative public discourse, and supporting rhetorical strategies. This discourse consisted of representations of differences between two languages, and of the superior/inferior cultural values that were invested in these differences. The real long-term effects of this discourse consisted of showing that a certain language and its speakers – the Elizabethan registration of cries, howls and other 'sounds divorced from sense' (Palmer 2001: 65) – could be treated as the behaviour of strange, 'wild' and bestial creatures who might, or might not, be considered in objective seriousness as fully human. This did indeed provide a justification for English colonialism at a time when Spain's encounter with the indigenous peoples of the New World led to "a shift in social thinking, away from an older humanist confidence in the potential for civility of even savage-seeming peoples" (Palmer 2001:16). We have also examined the anti-colonial arguments and pro-Irish reversal which this discourse subsequently provoked.

Our suggestion is that these discursive constructions, which set a polarity of values attached to one language against the opposite polarity of values attached to another language, anticipate similar colonial and anti-colonial discourse in the New World, India and Africa. Culminating in the nineteenth-century heyday of European imperial expansion, discourses about inferior/superior languages and their speakers led to voices of resistance that reversed rather than displaced, that were still imbricated within and rebounding upon, the structures of argumentation used by colonialism. The case of Ireland is an instance of the double bind in which, as Sartre (1957 [1965 xxviii]) claimed in another context, "a relentless reciprocity binds the colonizer to the colonized".

This adversarial space is also evidence for Cameron's (1995: 3) point that "making value judgements on language is an integral part of using

it and not an alien practice 'perversely grafted on'". Ireland testifies to how use of the same language – *both* "so familiar" *and* "so foreign" as Joyce (1916: 205) put it – can symbolize intense historical and political attachments for one part of a divided community, but not for the other. Such symbolization, and the power of language to unite and/or divide people, relies on polarities that *appear* to be fixed, natural and pre-existing. Hence the strength and efficacy of the arguments. Yet this fixity may well be confronted by the *reality* of change, diversity and hybridity.

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